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LIFTING THE SKIRT
ON THE VAGINA:
FEELING THE
UNKNOWN

KASHIKA ASHLEY COOPER

WORD COUNT 12156

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters by Research.

The University of Huddersfield, School of Art, Design & Architecture

2 APRIL 2019

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ABSTRACT

VAGINA MYTH TRANSFORMATION RESIDUE

The purpose of this research was to determine if there is a residue of myth in the products and rituals sold to consumers. Using the method of casting in the studio to evaluate the material properties of the objects collected in a materials library and transforming these objects online through Instagram as an editing tool and a tool for social engagement.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a development of interest in the media and public debates about the vagina. This comes from a transition of informal and frank conversations being shared on social media and people sharing their lived experience to break down the stigma associated with the vagina. The emergence of social media during my teenage years opened up a new way to engage socially and moved the conversation offline to online. Social media facilitates this transition and can be seen through social movements on Instagram with the everyday documentation of periods. @period.blood.truth (n.d) documents the everyday experience of dealing with menstrual cycles and a @vaginaarchives (n.d) documents daily vaginal fluids via their Instagram. Currently there is a museum which exists on Instagram (@vagina_museum) which is working towards a permanent home in London (Vagina Museum, 2019), an exhibition was dedicated to the Vulva by art collective Vulvae (2017) and Cliteracy (2014), an exhibition and performance project to educate the public about the clitoris conducted by Sophia Wallace. There is a growing market of products designed to help and change vagina-owners experiences and although there has been a shift in thinking around the topic on social media, there are still misconceptions about the vagina over pubic hair (Braun, Et Al, 2013) and vagina size (Praderio, 2018).. There is also the ancient practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and in Indonesia, Chaupadis are huts where menstruating women go for the duration of their periods as they are believed to be bad

omens (Lamsal, 2017). These huts are often far away from the home and lacking basic facilities and recently a woman and children died from carbon monoxide poisoning by lighting a fire to keep warm. ("Nepal woman and children die in banned 'menstruation hut", 2019). In the UK an array of colourfully packaged intimate washes to cleanse and 'clean' the vagina can be found on supermarket shelves. Throughout this text, I will be contemplating the case that there are still elements of myth in the products and rituals that consumers are sold. I will demonstrate that these myths are still relevant and prevalent in societies in the 21st century by exploring materials and products associated with the vagina. The practice-based research will address the following question;

How does the mythological history of the vagina relate to the products sold on shelves today and as an artist how can I intervene to transform the objects to understand the residue of these myths in contemporary culture?

OBJECTIVES

- Discuss the mythological history of the vagina and explore artists who have used the vagina to address mythological ideas in art.

- Use casting techniques in the studio to evaluate the relevance of the products marketed towards the vagina and to question the mythological aspects of the vagina in contemporary culture.
- Analyse the effectiveness of Instagram as a platform to showcase the art and reflect on Instagram as a tool for social engagement.

2.0 RESIDUE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to explore if there are still elements of myth in the products sold for the vagina and how as an artist do I understand these objects in relation to popular culture and as materials to work with. To be clear, when I refer to the vagina I am talking about the space inside the body including the womb that has been referred to as a 'power portal' (Lister, 2016 p.xix). I am not talking specifically about the vulva, however, the whole space including physical and metaphysical space taken up by the female sexual organs. I am situated within a cis-gendered feminist angle attempting to understand the potential impact of the mythological history of the vagina and how this has influenced the consumer market with the selection of products available to purchase.

In the first section, I will discuss a mythological history of the vagina and how these myths have influence in popular culture. I will explore this notion through the act of Ana-Suromai, a legend where women would raise their skirt to reveal the vagina to ward off evil spirits (Blackledge, 2003 p.12). The act of Ana-Suromai can be seen as brave and potent, a female equivalent of bearing arms; to unashamedly show their vagina as a tool 'for bringing the earth and all life back from the brink of destruction' (Blackledge, 2003 p.20).

The second section will explore how the vagina has been used within the act of Ana-Suromai to assert its power and autonomy in feminist art history. Ana-Suromai could be seen as a literal interpretation where each artist has displayed their vulva and vagina to an audience however there is more to the act of Ana-Suromai than what meets the eye. The act can be interpreted as being faced with the power of explicit and implicit depictions of the vagina, the layers of history and knowledge combined with the mythological interpretations which surround the vagina.

2.2 MYTH

The myth of the Vagina Dentata is a powerful one and represents the silencing of women in history and the fear of the female body and its sexuality. As Emma L. E. Ree's notes; 'the threat of castration (more accurately, perhaps of amputation), although a fiction, can be used to justify the maiming of women's bodies, and the primitive legend of the Vagina Dentata - the toothed vagina - still functions to legitimize, or even promote, misogynistic practices such as female genital mutilation' (2014 p.52). This myth is prevalent in almost every continent in the world and each culture has its own version which follows a similar thread where the female is subjected to having a tooth removed via a piece of thread or stone or wooden penis (Rees, 2014, pp.53-54; Blackledge, p.167.).

The Vagina Dentata stories revolve around the fear of male castration and the fear that the female is uncontrollable, unbound and needs taming hence the teeth being removed. There are links to the dated idea of Hysteria where the clitoris is often interpreted as the final 'tooth' of the Vagina Dentata (Rees, 2014) and clitorectomy was suggested by Isaac Baker Brown quoted by Catherine Blackledge; 'Science sanctioned these excisions using the convenient 'theory' that removing the clitoris could cure conditions as varied as incontinence, uterine haemorrhaging, hysteria, and mania brought on by masturbation.' (2003, p.132)

The Vagina Dentata itself has been promoted in popular culture with the film *Teeth* (Lichtenstein, 2007), it has inspired many band names¹ and Etsy also has a selection of vagina dentata inspired memorabilia and ephemera to purchase (2019)². There have been other interpretations of the Vagina Dentata represented in the film *Jaws* (Spielberg, 1975) (the shark is the vagina) (Conger & Ervin, 2011) and the myth has also inspired Sonnet Ehlers, a medical researcher, to create the 'Rape-aXe' which is a toothed sheath-condom device designed to catch rapists and deter rape in South Africa (Blank, 2016; Shea, 2005; Rape-aXe, n.d.). I would like to suggest the potential subtle representations of the Vagina Dentata could be claimed to

¹ Vagina Dentata were a heavy metal band in the 1980s from 1980-1985 (Celebrity Skin (band), n.d.). An Indonesian band had the same name from 2011-Present (Esteroth666, 2012) and in 2011 Vagina Dentata was the name of a punk band from Gent, Belgium from 2011-Present (Last.FM, n.d.). Lastly, in 2013 (-2016) another band under the same name from Stockholm, Sweden were formed (rebelsister, 2016).

² A selection of Vagina Dentata ephemera including pins, jewellery, candy bowls, spiritual motifs and stickers (Etsy, 2019)

be found in cleansing products, gels, douches and feminine deodorants on sale in the feminine hygiene aisle of supermarkets with the emphasis on keeping the vagina clean to cleanse away the teeth, shame, or stigma which I will expand on further in the practice section.

A further area of importance are myths in medical science which have been documented from the 16th century suggests various theories about how the vagina came into being (Blackledge, 2003 pp.63-71). The author Blackledge has developed a key text which explores the varied history of the vagina and suggests that the vagina has been misunderstood over the centuries. One theory was the vagina was an inverted penis where the ovaries are the testicles and the vaginal walls are the penis and this went hand in hand with the thought that women were 'cold blooded creatures' and therefore not hot enough to expel the penis to the outside of the body like a male (Blackledge, 2003 p.70). It is believed that men were 'hot-blooded' creatures which is why the sexual organs are on the outside of the body. (Blackledge, 2003 pp.70-71).

'Renaissance anatomists found themselves proclaiming that the vagina was an unevolved, unfurled penis, ovaries were testicles, the uterus was a scrotum and the clitoris was a penis too.'
(Blackledge, 2003, p.4).

Medical science often ignored what they could physically see on the post mortem table to fit with the ideas and thinking of the day (Blackledge, 2003). A prime example is the understanding of the clitoris. According to Blackledge 'more was understood about the clitoris in 1672' than when the writer was born in 1968 (Blackledge, 2003 p.7). To further this claim in 2016 Odile Fillod 3D printed a clitoris (with the file being shared under a creative commons licence allowing people access to print their own) as a tool for sexual education in French schools as there is a common lack of information and misinformation.

'One of these biases is the absence of a correct representation of the clitoris (and even, in some cases, the absence of a mention of the clitoris) in a large number of textbooks which are supposed to teach what female genital organs actually look like.'
(Fillod cited in Bensoussan, 2016).

Nowadays within contemporary culture, there are myths that still persist for example that the vagina is loose (Moore & Ruderman, 2019), things can get lost inside the vagina (Praderio, 2018) and that the vagina needs cleansing (Praderio, 2018; Selby, 2017). Further research into the contemporary social understanding of the vagina has been conducted, notably by Virginia Braun (2001; 2010) into the use of cleansing washes (Jenkins, A.L., Crann, S.E., Money, D.M. et al., 2018) which has brought into focus the practice of v-steaming popularised by Gwyneth Paltrow (King, 2015). This ritual has

been found in Indonesian (Heifetz, 2016), ancient Greek (King, 2015), Spanish and Korean cultures (Lister, p.213) as a way to cleanse the vagina; “You sit on what is essentially a mini-throne, and a combination of infrared and mugwort steam cleanses your uterus, et al. It is an energetic release ...”. (Paltrow; cited in King 2015). It’s believed to rejuvenate and cleanse the vagina of bad energy and the practice has been adopted by Paltrow and Lisa Lister (pp.213-220) being used under the guise of wellness potentially perpetuating the notion that the vagina is physically or spiritually dirty.

V-Steamming as a practice is similar to Yoni Pearls. Yoni Pearls are herbal tampons which are inserted into the vagina and they are marketed to cleanse the vagina; similar to yoni steaming, they list a series of ailments they can treat; cramping, leftover menstrual blood, blockages, cysts, painful periods, dryness and to tighten the vagina. (Embrace Pangea, 2019; Goddess Detox, n.d.; Weinberg, 2016). There was an article in the news warning of the potential dangers of using Yoni Pearls (Mortimer, 2016; Gunter, 2016).

Ana-Suromai or ‘lifting the skirt’ is a centuries-old act of raising one’s skirt to display the vulva. The legend has roots in Egypt, Africa and Italy and the act, according to myth, has been performed to end a war, increase the fertility of farming land and bring the sun back to the earth (Blackledge, 2003 pp.8-12). There are different interpretations of the act, one where Ana-Suromai is used to incite shame or ferocity and the other to increase fertility and

fecundity of the land. There is a third understanding where lifting the skirt has been used in a playful and humorous manner in the Japanese Shinto legend of Ama-no-Uzume-no-Mikoto where the deity dances;

‘on an upturned bucket or basket, lifting her skirt and exposing her sacred genitals... Her revealing dance causes the watching gods and goddesses to laugh and applaud noisily, and as a result heaven and earth start to shake’ (Blackledge, 2003 pp.19-21).

This act coaxes a hiding Shinto sun deity Amaterasu-o-mi-Kami out of a cave bringing the sun back to the earth. Another raising the skirt is the Grecian myth of Demeter and Persephone. This is a humorous take on the lifting of the skirt whereby Persephone lifts her skirt to the humour of Demeter as a ‘restorative act’ (Blackledge, 2003, p.20) who is mourning the death of their daughter Kore.

In the following section, I will explore a series of artists who have used the act of Ana-Suromai in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century. Contemporary acts of Ana-Suromai can be seen in the work of artists Carolee Schneemann, Annie Sprinkle, Casey Jenkins, Deborah de Robertis and Maja Malou Lyse, each artist raising their skirt for different agendas. The act of Ana-Suromai has been used over centuries and documented in folklore as a tool to assert dominance and power. Through the lens of Ana-Suromai, I will explore the

nature of each artists' work in chronological order as they've raised their skirt and faced the audience with their vulvas and vaginas explicitly and addressed the implicit relationships between mythological influence and contemporary social understanding. I hope to link the performances to the residual mythological ideas which are present in the performances.

2.3 ANA-SUROMAI IN ART

Carolee Schneemann was an artist who is known for their performative work such as *Meat Joy* (1964), *Fuses* (1964) and *Interior Scroll* (1975) where Schneemann unfurled a scroll from their vagina crouching naked on a table read a 'secret' message (Morgan, 1997, p.100) to the audience (performed at *Women Here & Now*, East Hampton, Long Island, 1975).

Schneemann's act of *Ana-Suromai* goes deeper into the performance, addressing the idea of 'vulvic space' (Moreland, 2016) by reaching into the unknown. The idea of vulvic space is fascinating because it brings into context the conflict with the idea of cleansers, deodorants and gels for the vagina available to purchase on supermarket shelves. Schneemann saw the vagina '... in many ways-physically, conceptually: as a sculptural form, an architectural referent, the source of sacred knowledge, ecstasy, birth passage, transformation.' (Schneemann; cited in Morgan 1997) The unfurling of the scroll has serpent-like qualities and symbolism synonymous with the vagina. It was believed that Medusa's hair of snakes were phallic

representations and the snake's mouth was the vagina similar to the vagina dentata (Rees 2014, p.59). As Schneemann comments;

'I saw the vagina as a translucent chamber of which the serpent was an outward model: enlivened by its passage from the visible to the invisible, a spiralled coil ringed with the shape of desire and generative mysteries, attributes of both female and male sexual powers.' (Schneemann; cited in Morgan 1997)

Schneemann's act subverts the body as object and Schneemann has control, autonomy and agency in the performance. In terms of mythological history, Schneemann is inspired by the Neolithic and goddess interpretations of the vulva. Also, the point of Schneemann's work was to define the erotic as political and the political as erotic and use the body as a tool to do so removing the fetishised idea of the female body (Moreland, 2015).

Rees comments that rather than making the invisible visible the artist has taken the;

'movement was from the 'visible to the invisible', as though female sexuality enters the realm of the ineffable and unseen once it is made public: real female 'visibility', as in 'connotation', lies in the indiscernibility of the vagina, cervix and uterus' (2014, p.276)



FIG . 1 Carolee Schneemann, *Interior Scroll* (1975). Photographed by Anthony McCall.

In the 1990s, Annie Sprinkle toured openly showing their cervix to an audience in Public Cervix Announcement (Post Porn Modernist, 1989-1996) theatre performance. This unveiling in the 1990s shows that the myth of the Vagina Dentata is still relevant in contemporary culture. Sprinkle's reason behind the performance was to show '*that neither the vagina nor the cervix contains any teeth*' (Sprinkle cited in Rees, 2014 p.282). Sprinkle's unveiling facilitated an opportunity for the public to see a cervix which is not readily available to view every day. The performance has been immortalised online by the posting of their cervix on their website. There is a modern Japanese version of Ana-Suromai known as tokudashi. 'A tokudashi show emphasises the light-bringing aspect of the vagina with a strange twist - the audience are given tiny torches by the performer just before she displays herself.' (Blackledge, 2003 p.21). Interestingly Sprinkle gave the audience torches to look at the artists' cervix during the performance.

Sprinkle follows Schneemann in using the body and their own cervix as a performative tool with full autonomy and control over their body. Sprinkle advises that the performance was 'not to demystify the vagina because the vagina is a miracle in itself' (Sprinkle, n.d.) however to an extent I understand and agree with the idea of the way the human body has evolved is miraculous however the vagina has been misunderstood, mutilated and oppressed for centuries. Only now is there some understanding of the power and potential of the vagina away from it being a vessel to birth children.

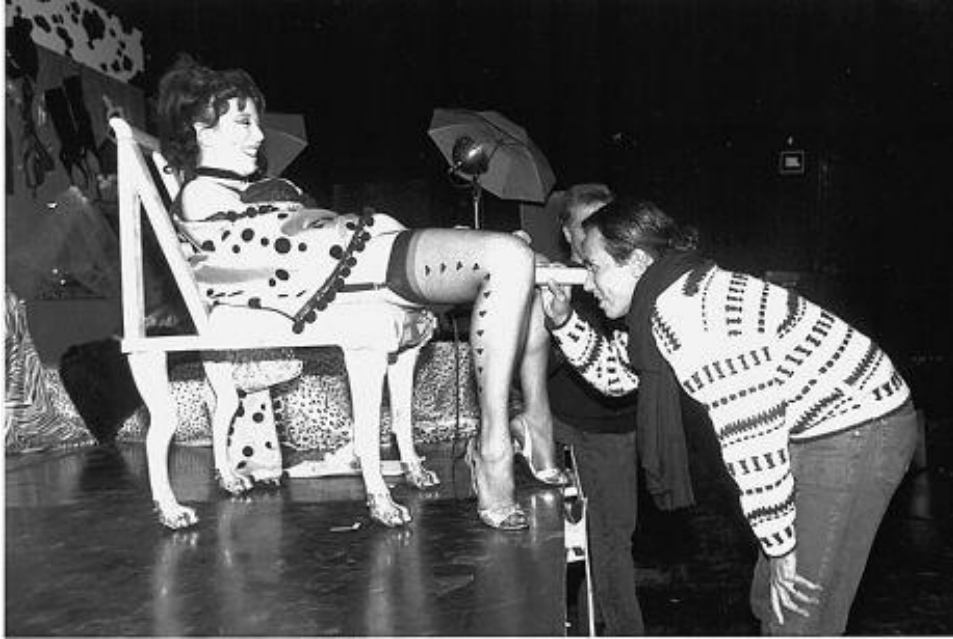


FIG . 2 Annie Sprinkles, *Public Cervix Announcement* as part of the *Post Porn Modernist* show (1990).



FIG . 3 Casey Jenkins, *Casting Off My Womb* (2013). Performed at the Darwin Visual Arts Association.



FIG. 4 Deborah de Robertis, *Mirror Origin* (2014). Performed at the Musee d'Orsay.



FIG. 5 Maja Malou Lyse, *How to Stay Out of the Gyno's Office* (2016).

Casey Jenkins knitted from their vagina following a similar line to Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1970). Instead of unfurling a scroll, Jenkins unfurls a ball of wool inserted into the vagina daily for 28 days capturing the ebbs and flow of their menstrual blood as each length of the scarf is hung on coat hangers. *Casting Off My Womb* (2013) became a viral sensation after Special Broadcasting Service Two (SBS2) created a short film about the performance retitled *Vaginal Knitting* (Stevens, 2016). The video garnered significant media attention and social media engagement which brought to the forefront the negative, derogatory and misogynistic perception of the vagina (specifically the menstruating vagina) found in the comment sections of sites such as Facebook and Youtube (Stevens, 2016). These comments have been used and turned into new work by Jenkins (Jenkins, 2016). The artist wanted to cast off negative perceptions of the vagina and the performance has roots in the slow craft movement which is not reflected when condensed down to a 2 minute and 48-second video (Stevens, 2016). The artist has bravely, like others before them, using their vulvic space and platform to openly explore the idea of the unknown, knitting from a space which is almost invisible and creating something physical. An area of interest in the creation of the work is the wool had to be stored in fridges overnight to stop the wool absorbing too much moisture and the yarn and needles became slippery when Jenkins was menstruating (Stevens, 2016). I imagine a tension when knitting and this could reflect the tension of myth and reality, cleanliness and dirt. Periods are advertised and neatly boxed and packaged, tucked away and Jenkins like Schneemann is reaching internally to remove

the hidden aspect and face the audience in their fullness. There is a negative perception of Jenkins work online and I wonder if the audience could view the performance over the 28-day period in real time if they would have the same reaction or if the process would give the audience time to think and reflect on their own perception of a vagina. That is not to suggest that the comments would not surface and the audience may have the same aversions and disgust towards the work.

One year on in 2014, Deborah de Robertis sat in front of Courbet's painting *The Origin of the World* (1886) at the Musee d'Orsay, Paris, and openly displayed their vagina to the audience in the gallery. This act is another form of Ana-Suromai, in this case, de Robertis lifting their dress, to create an identity for the sexually objectified model. This is a non-traditional act of Ana-Suromai and has a different intention compared to Sprinkle. De Robertis' intention is to create an uncomfortable experience for the viewer and subvert the audience's gaze and reclaim the model in the painting identity. De Robertis's reasoning behind the performance was;

"There is a gap in art history, the absent point of view of the object of the gaze. In his realist painting, the painter shows the open legs, but the vagina remains closed. He does not reveal the hole, that is to say, the eye. I am not showing my vagina, but I am revealing what we do not see in the painting, the eye of the vagina, the black hole, this concealed eye, this chasm, which, beyond the

flesh, refers to infinity, to the origin of the origin." (cited in Brooks, 2014).

This performance is also similar to Schneemann's Interior Scroll as both artists are working with the idea of the objectified body and both artists are fully present in their performances which subverts the gaze and creates autonomy.

Maja Malou Lyse is an artist who utilises the internet and social media to promote and educate the audience about sexuality and the vagina. Similar to Sprinkle, Lyse has shown groups of people their cervix in Cervical Selfie (2017). This has been live-streamed online and Lyse has created a guidebook on how to self-perform pelvic exams in How to Stay out of the Gyno's Office (2016) complete with a speculum). The guidebook is reminiscent of Our Bodies, Ourselves formally Women and Their Bodies which was a booklet created by the Boston's Women's Health Book Collective in 1970, empowering women to do their own pelvic exams to broaden the individual's knowledge of the vagina along with knowledge on sexual health and abortion. Lyse has created a contemporary version of Public Cervix Announcement by using Instagram to share their work with the audience. Lyse's earlier work Booth Bitch (2012- present) adopts a web-based chat room style and is open to the public to submit questions via Tumblr. It is important to note that Lyse's work originates on Tumblr via Booth Bitch and collaborations with Arvida Bystrom (Selfie Stick Aerobics, 2015)

who adopt pop culture imagery. In both works, Lyse is reclaiming their own experiences of the body by sharing them online curating their own empowering perspective of identity through social media.

3.0 PRACTICE

3.1 PREVIOUS PRACTICE



FIG . 6 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled*, (2014). Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

The origin of this research project developed during my undergraduate degree in Textile Crafts. I investigated the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of the English language to describe the vulva through anecdotal accounts and conversations. I looked towards printed textiles to create an alternative language to interpret the vulva and used quantitative data analysis, collecting vulva measurements, to produce a collection of pared-back vulva prints to show the diversity of vulva size. The prints were sublimation printed onto duchess satin which I chose for its heavy-weight, luxurious texture.

Reflecting on this body of work it felt clinical and removed the varied historical, anecdotal and aesthetic richness of the vulva in which I was initially investigating. The printed duchess satin samples felt primarily focused on a surface-level visual aesthetic and a 2D representation of something which is not flat in physical appearance or metaphorical interpretation. In *Lifting the Skirt on the Vagina; Feeling the Unknown* I want to open up my research to include a range of diverse and creative approaches to understand the vagina beneath the surface and open up the complexity of the subject which before I did not appreciate. My background in Textile Crafts nurtured the creative processes of sampling and materials research which I will continue in this body of research.

I would like to put forward a creative methodology of the toolbox. This is a metaphorical and physical object which has all the tools I needed to create my artwork. This includes the materials I collected, the moulds I cast from and the input of information from research and inspiration from artists.

3.2 THE STUDIO

The studio played an important role in the development of my practice and research process as I learned to navigate across three different spaces, situating myself across each and not fitting into one specific space. I took advantage of this opportunity forming a transdisciplinary practice which

spanned across different facets of what a studio is in the traditional sense and what it could be in a virtual context online. I found enjoyment in moving the work across each studio location from the traditional studio space at Kin, into the private domestic sphere and into the conventional Instagram.

I spread my practice across three studio spaces; Kin, a cooperative studio space in the centre of Huddersfield which was public-facing and exposed due to its prior history of a shop with high windows. The second studio space was my private home studio where I worked in the domestic sphere which opened up an opportunity to work with materials I had to hand. The final studio space was my mobile phone which acted as a portable studio space in which I engaged with Instagram. Each space had their advantages and their limitations and this was critical in the development of my practice as I learnt to navigate fluidly between the three and learnt where my practice sits within the traditional, non-traditional and trans-disciplinary studio-based practice. In the following subsections, I will discuss the evaluative properties of making, working and reflecting in these spaces and how they have influenced my practice. I take reference from other collectives and artists who have built, created and navigated their way through making their own work starting with Unna Way and Womanhouse (1972) and reflect on the physical work of creating space moving through to the home and then the navigation of Instagram and how other artists have created space online.

Unna Way was situated in an old, dilapidated ballet studio which had remnants of its history on the walls and wooden floors. Unna Way was an exhibition programme set up by Charlotte Cullen and myself to bridge the gap between other major cities and create a space to exhibit contemporary art practice. We had to openly curate the space with the artwork accepting the limitations of the space and using it to our advantage utilising the height of the room along with the floor-to-ceiling mirrors. This navigation of space is something to carry through into this research within the navigation of space in social media, navigation of materials and navigation through the history and complexity of the subject matter. The artists we worked with were influencing within my own practice with their use of materials and open approach to using unusual and everyday items. I was fortunate to be able to work directly with the artists' work during the process which highlighted the beauty in the objects of everyday.

3.3.1 PUBLIC STUDIO

The reason why I am discussing Womanhouse, Unna Way and Kin is because they are all spaces which were created when there was no climate at the time to create art in an inclusive and accepting space. Unna Way was formed to represent the contemporary art scene in Huddersfield and bridge a link between major art cities like Manchester to show a programme of international artists in a traditional town setting. Kin was initiated by

Charlotte Cullen, myself and other artists and similarly was born out of a desire to create an inclusive open co-operative studio which was operated by the studio holders where most studios in the town were run by a main manager and were expensive. These are examples of creating physical space, however, online spaces through Instagram and Tumblr offer similar opportunities without the cost and funding needed to run, maintain and importantly create the space needed which the internet can fulfil.

Kin evolved from the artist-led gallery space, Unna Way which was established in 2016. Kin currently has 6 artists from different practices including embroidery, print, fine art and sculpture. Our intention for Kin was to create a space to facilitate artist's practice, exhibitions and encourage a growing artist community. The studio is situated in a small shopping avenue from the main high street in Huddersfield which acts as a walkthrough to other parts of the town. There is a lot of foot traffic through the shopping avenue and the studio has high windows which created interest from the public when working in the space.

There was a feeling of over-exposure to work in the open studio space especially when I was not ready to share parts of my practice I was working on. With the nature of my work, I was sometimes concerned with privacy and my ability to explore my practice openly. I was wary of the public eye wary because the work may not be final or complete which differs from the use of

Instagram as I was able to curate the imagery before posting. I found I did hide areas of my practice such as my Materials Library and cast objects because I felt unready to share them with the public. However, through the exposure of Kin and working with Unna Way provided a helpful environment to become acquainted with working in a public-facing space and to receive feedback from members of Kin and to be part of a constantly supportive network. For example, one studio holder advised that the artefacts I had created appeared like macaroons. This feedback provided inspiration to develop further food-based materials to work with. In terms of the physical creation of the space, I take reference from Womanhouse (1972) and their practical and creative approach to creating a feminist college programme within an abandoned Hollywood mansion. This influence was present during my time at Unna Way as we learnt to navigate our way through an old ballet dance studio and we did not want to lose the history of the dance studio but to honour it and work with it.



FIG . 7 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Studio Space*, (2016). Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.



FIG . 8 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Kin*, (2016). Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

3.3.2 HOME STUDIO



FIG. 9 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Casting in the Home Studio*, (2017). Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

In contrast to Kin, working in my home studio was less restrictive because I felt less exposed and I had more freedom to be open around my practice. My home studio is personal, private and promoted the experimental making phase and an opportunity to be inventive away from the public exposure of Kin. In terms of photography, I found photographing my work at home was different from my photography at Kin. Kin facilitated the opportunity to create professional photos with bright lighting and in a neutral space which transformed my objects and photography from an exploratory object into a final, finished artefact. A key difference between the home studio photography was to document a process and capture the initial qualities of an object I had created. Often the photos were taken in situ of working

space as instant documentation of a working process. Kin's role was to transform this process, taking the objects out of the home-laboratory space and place them in a neutral setting. My home studio felt as though it was ever-changing and aided an open making-phase and Kin facilitated a contemplative space where I could consider my objects and photography.

3.3.3 PORTABLE STUDIO

The final space I occupied in my practice was my mobile phone. This studio space was portable and meant I could create work whilst in transit. It felt intuitive to use the mobile phone due to the contemporary nature of the platform and its use in popular culture. It was an instantaneous process with the ability to publish directly and exhibit immediately to an audience if that was the preferred choice. Working within Instagram follows on from the movement of using Tumblr as an online gallery platform to create space where there may not be the physical climate to do so.

As mentioned by Magdalena Olszanowski (2014), other artists (@_loveafter, @skinblues__, @Cassia) have navigated their way through Instagram using various methods to work with the draconian and regressive censorship policies of Instagram (Olszanowski, 2014). This includes blurring or masking images or using post-production applications to alter photographs, keeping

posts active for a certain length of time before being removed and making an account private (Olszanowski, 2014). Part of my own practice with using Instagram was to navigate around the censorship rules and work in a way which was subversive and suggestive to avoid the potential of having a post removed and use these limitations to my advantage. Similar to @Cassia and @_loveafter, I also, during the making process, privatised my account briefly, not out of fear of my account being deactivated but to create some private space where I could still post work and create a gap between myself and the audience.

To further this idea, Olszanowski coins the phrase *sensorship* as a “...term to provoke the notion of censoring the senses. Censorship constitutes a removal of objectionable content, while *sensorship* is a removal of the experience of the senses” (Olszanowski, 2014, p.94). I feel to some degree the practices of removing, masking and covering parts of the body (in the case of these artists who create work via self-imagery) do indeed censor the senses because artists are circumventing their way around the policies and guidelines stipulated by Instagram to produce their work. The role of Instagram's policies can be seen to create a template for what is and is not acceptable, creating a narrow view of the way female bodies should be perceived and accepted. In terms of the mythological aspect of working with Instagram, the narrow view perpetuated by Instagram's terms of use further the myth and idea about what is and is not acceptable about the female body with the potential to create more myths and mysticism. A challenge

then is for artists to risk the deactivation of accounts and keep posting anyway to broaden the spectrum of visual imagery available even if it is for a brief amount of time or to subvert the gaze to create imagery which is subversive rather than explicit to work with and against Instagram as a potential act of protest. Even with the restrictive limits of Instagram's terms of use, as Olszanowski states; "Maybe part of the appeal of Instagram and all its concomitant censorship policies is that these women are co-constructing their own space where there isn't space for them." (2014, p.93).

From the points outlined in my navigation of space through the notion of the studio, I am aware of potentially hypocritical behaviour whilst dealing with the controversial subject of the vagina in that I was conscious of the public gaze and it altered my behaviour. My intent is not to adopt explicit imagery but to subvert the gaze because as I reinterpret everyday materials to find a new way to understand and look at the vagina.

3.5 MATERIALS LIBRARY



FIG. 10 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Materials Library*, (2017). Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

The Materials Library was a collection of objects, items and materials I collected as part of my initial research into objects associated with the subject as a form of materials investigation. The Materials Box was full of a selection of items such as sanitary towels, tampons, Femfresh intimate wash, condoms, lubricant, branded feminine washes, talc and contraceptive pills. The Materials Box facilitated the immersion into products that I would not normally take notice of and broadened my approach to materials research of everyday materials. It highlighted a series of products which are on the market and prompted an assessment of the usefulness of some of these products. For example, tampons can be made from organic cotton or rayon

fibres and some are scented. By pulling apart sanitary towels I found different layers and textures to the items, which was a refreshing tactile process I had not engaged with before and created a new appreciation of the components the item was made from. This process presented the opportunity to understand the products themselves by investigating what they are made of, the consistency of the substances, the smell, texture and question the interrelationship with the vagina. I became interested in the range of products on the market, including an expensively-packaged cleanser, serums and gels, tightening soap and talc. These everyday products seemed out of place compared to menstrual hygiene products due to their suggestive notions of cleansing and affirmations and promises.

3.6 CASTING

Following the notion of 'vulvic space' (Moreland, 2016) intuitively led to the process of casting from working closely with artists' work during the curation process within the Unna Way programme and refocused an opportunity to adopt casting as a method to utilise in my own practice. On the initial outset it could be considered this method was similar to a surface and material investigations however, on reflection the process became a significant part of forming the basis of my practice. Using casting techniques in the studio allowed for reflection and to evaluate the relevance of the products marketed towards the vagina collected in the materials library to question

the mythological aspects of the vagina in contemporary culture.

Working as part of Unna Way I was introduced to the work of Anna Reading who's *Awaiting Compression Below* (2016) featured in '*...And To Dust All Return*'. The slip cast appeared fossilised and had sediment qualities with its built up layers. The mould was moulded from a pair of jogging bottoms which have been cemented and transformed into something outside of the items original intention. The casting process has created depth and could be considered a representation of negative space.

Other artists who have used casting as a medium include Rachel Whiteread and Janine Antoni. In Antoni's *Lick and Lather* (1993), the artist cast a bust of themselves out of soap and chocolate seven times. Each bust made from chocolate was licked several times and each bust made from soap was washed several times (Antoni, n.d.). The erosion from this process is intimate and similar to Boulton's *Doves* (2016) which also captured a form of intimacy with the handling of the soap by the artist's friends. The use of everyday materials in the work of Antoni, Boulton and Reading resonate in my own practice with the materials I collected as part of the materials library. The use of soap in Antoni's and Boulton's work has elements of cleansing rituals found in the washes I collected.

Rachel Whiteread's smaller casts of hot water bottles (*Untitled*, *Yellow*

Torso, 1991; *Untitled (Clear Torso)* 1993; *Untitled (Pink Torso)*, 1995) and everyday objects such as an airbed (*Airbed II*, 1992) and *Untitled (Twenty-Four Switches)*, (1998), cast out of aluminium, capture the negative space of the objects which resonates with my practice as I am trying to capture the vagina and womb-space outside of the body. As Rachel Carley notes Whiteread's work *Ghost* (1990), specifically blends “space, the material employed by modern architects to dissolve the divisions between inside and outside” (Carley, p.29). Whiteread captures internal space to create negatives of buildings and objects which reveals and recasts the viewers view of the object, closes of certain aspects of what cannot be seen and brings unhighlighted surfaces to present. Within my own casting when mixing materials such as teeth or tampons sometimes they were hidden inside the cast and not always visible from the outside and depth could be created from not being able to see the whole object.



FIG . 11 Sarah Boulton, *Doves*, (2016). Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.



FIG. 12 Anna Reading, *Awaiting Compression Below*, (2016). Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

Sarah Boulton's work compared to Reading's was subtly disruptive in the placement of the artwork in the exhibitions '*...And To Dust All Return*' (2015) and *S/S18 Collection* (2016) which was a conscious choice as a curator to compliment the subtlety of Boulton's practice. *Doves* (2016) was a collection of bars of soap in which friends had pre-handled and were preserved with marks from the users' hands. Boulton's use of the everyday object captured a familiar and intimate process which may not normally garner attention. When the soap was moved from the home space into the gallery it transformed the object and heightened elements of the soap such as the smell which filled the space. *Doves* is poetic and sensory exploration and gave a new depth in understanding within my own practice in relation to my approach to photography with the ability to capture the essence of an everyday ritual.

Hannah Regal's fat and tripe sculpture *Please* (2015) shown in Unna Way's *Nothing* exhibition (2015) is similar to Antoni's *Gnaw* (1993) where Antoni gnawed at a block of chocolate and a block of lard due to the choice of materials used. The use of everyday materials is an important factor in my own practice because it adds layers of meaning and depth to my work and allows for the better understanding of the relevance of the materials I have collected and to understand their physical and metaphysical composition.

From working closely with artists work in the curation process, I considered casting as a process to utilise in my own practice. The process presented an opportunity to explore the interrelationship of the materials I collected and the internal space of the vagina to give a form to space which I could not see. I was reintroduced into a new way of approaching casting through Reading's work in 'To Dust All Return' (2016) and I developed an appreciation of everyday materials in the work of Boulton. The final outcome of the casts was reminiscent of the artefacts I witnessed at the Wellcome Trust³ in 2016 and created a direct link between historical research and my contemporary practice by reinterpreting the artefacts.

³ In 2016 I visited the Wellcome Trust and saw a series of terracotta vulvas and uteri which were interesting to add a further historical context within my contemporary research.



FIG . 13 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Plain Teeth)*, (2017). Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.



FIG . 14 Sarah Boulton, *Doves*, (2016). Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

3.4.1 CASTING TABLES

In the following section, I will discuss the process of casting in a series of tables. This is a methodological approach to capture an intuitive experience which on post-reflection happened in parallel where I would cast an artefact and then transform the object into Instagram to explore the material qualities, pattern and form to deepen my understanding of the work I was creating.

WAX WOMB



FIG. 15 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Wax Womb*, (2017).
Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper

MATERIALS SCULPTURAL QUALITIES

- Sugaring Wax
 - Cotton Paper
- Sticky
 - Viscous
 - Malleable
 - Sensuous
 - Alien Mass
 - Suggestive

DESCRIPTION

This artefact was cast into a squeeze bottle mould as I was looking for something to represent the internal space of the vagina. I set the wax in the freezer and then coaxed it out as it slowly melted using scissors.

ANALYSIS

The outcome of this artefact was accidental however I like the contrast of the materials with the conceptional aims of the object. Sugaring wax is used in hair removal and recasting the wax into a new form which mimics the terracotta uterus seen at the Wellcome Trust. The artefact looks like a sticky date, food and the vagina have an interesting relationship with colloquial connotations. The method used to obtain the cast has left visible score marks which could be interpreted as aggressive but they soon melted out of the cast as the artefact adjusted to room temperature. The sugaring wax has been transformed into something vicious and sensuous in appearance subverting the original intention of the wax to remove body hair.

TRANSFORMATION



FIG . 16 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Wax Womb*, (2017). Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper

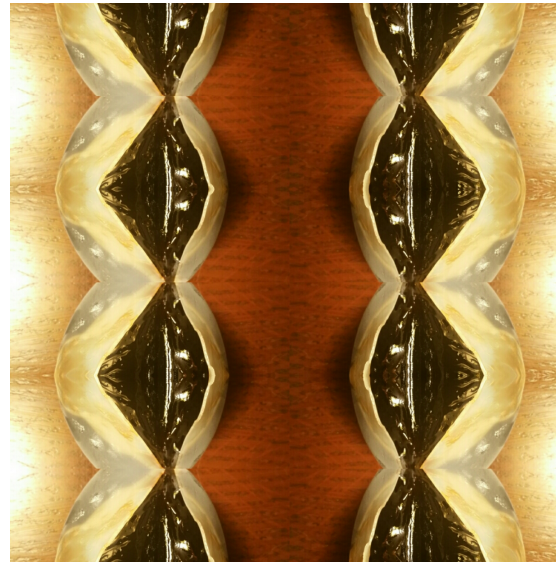


FIG . 17 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Wax Womb*, (2017). Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

ANALYSIS

Posting the image on Instagram has transformed the object and the materials into something abstract and suggestive. As with most of my artefacts, I feel it is important to consider the qualities which can be gained and lost during the Instagram transformation process. Adjusting the brightness has highlighted the glossy properties of the wax. Fig 21. was curated whilst I was thinking about the vagina dentata and the notion of soft teeth. The image repetition has eye-like qualities and the outcome has been far-removed from the materials original properties.

In Fig 20. you can see the original mould I cast the wax in and parts are still frozen to sections of the mould. This transformation is less abstract but still suggestive and could have mythological interpretations with the repeat pattern and as the image has been repeated there are subtle transformations of lines to create suggestive central core imagery.

STONES

SCULPTURAL QUALITIES

- Smooth
- Slick
- Ethereal

MATERIALS

- Balloon
- Camera Film Holder
- Sass Intimate Wash
- Veneer Dental Teeth
- Sponge
- Camera Film Holders
- Stones

DESCRIPTION

The objects are small camera film holders with balloons over the top representing the notion of vagina size. They were topped with selected stones, Sass Intimate Gel Wash and dental veneers.

ANALYSIS

Not technically a cast but a triptych sculpture collection which has an ethereal feel. I was inspired by Lisa Lister's discussion on the use of healing crystals and selected three from a list of various stones. I mixed the stones selected for cleansing properties with Sass intimate gel wash and sponges as all are associated with cleansing rituals of the vagina. I added the dental veneers as a nod to the vagina dentata. I feel from the outset the materials I have used may not be obvious as they have been abstracted from their packaging. The conceptual idea behind this piece was to explore the relationship between spiritual and physical cleansing rituals mixed with the myth of the Vagina Dentata, vagina size and the unclean vagina.



FIG. 18 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Stones* (2017). Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper

TRANSFORMATION

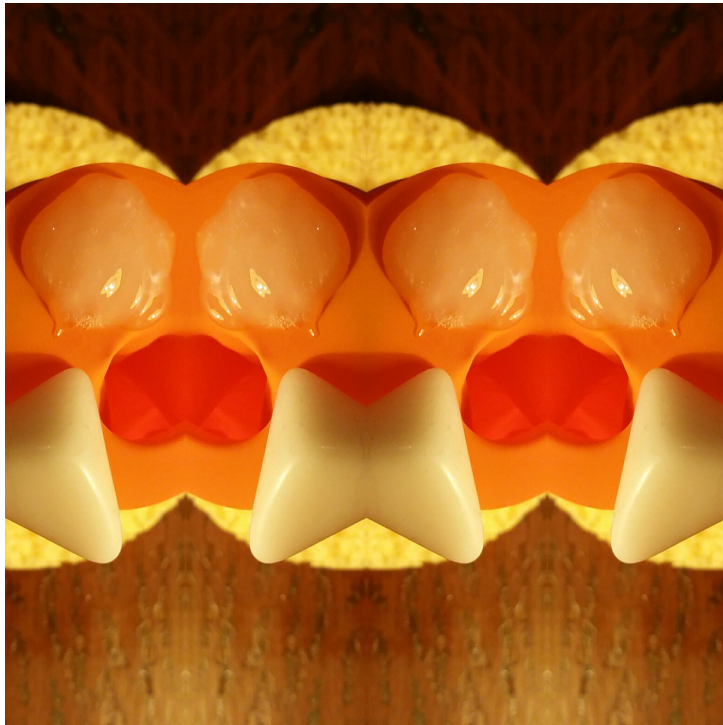


FIG. 19 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Stones* (2017). Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

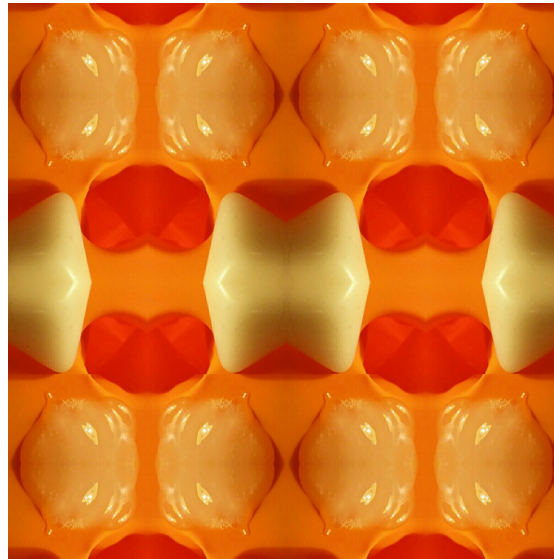


FIG. 20 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Stones* (2017). Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

ANALYSIS

Working with the image in Instagram has allowed for the transformation of the original artefact and the materials collected from the materials library. *Stones* was a comment on the spiritual and ritualistic physical notion of cleansing the vagina. The manipulation of the photographs have created teeth-like representations and in Fig. 26 the repetition of the image has created a kaleidoscopic effect. These effects blur the boundaries of the original image and are open to interpretation by the viewer.

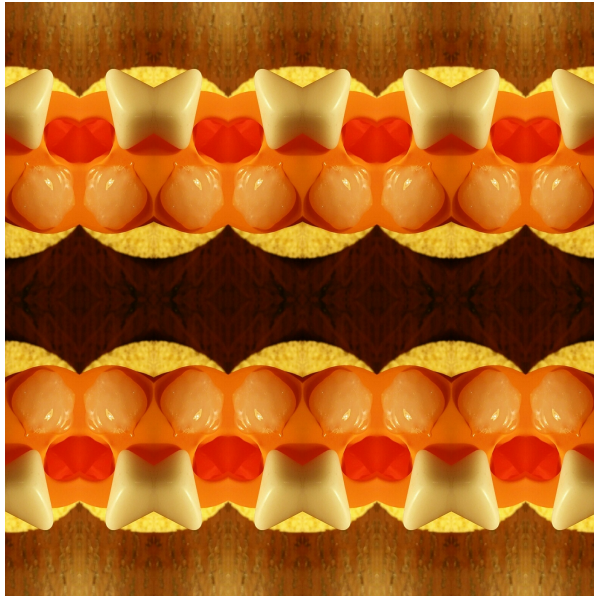


FIG . 2 1 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Stones* (2017).
 Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

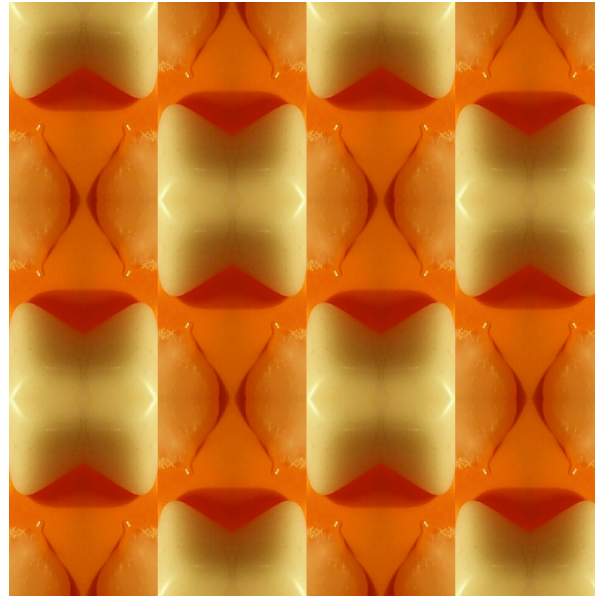


FIG . 2 2 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Stones* (2017).
 Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

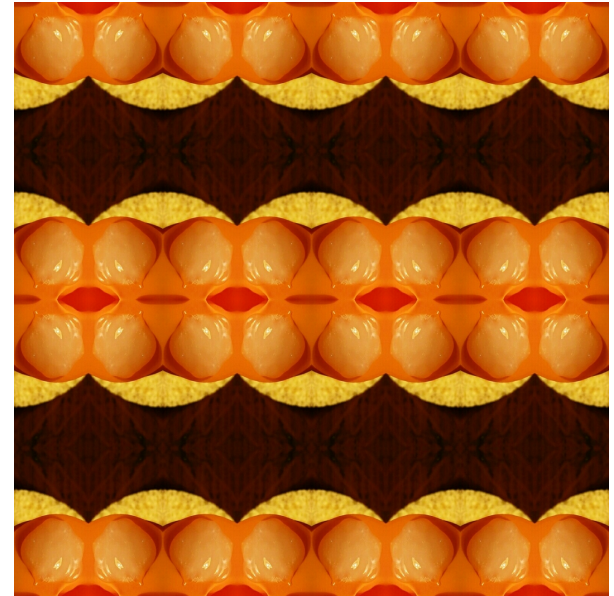


FIG . 2 3 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Stones* (2017).
 Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

UNTITLED (ORANGE)



FIG. 24 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Orange)* (2017).
Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

MATERIALS

- Plaster of Paris
- Orange and green food colouring gel
- Tampons

SCULPTURAL QUALITIES

- Fluffy
- Coarse
- Neon
- Smooth
- Egg

DESCRIPTION

This was cast in a small funnel using orange and green food gel and tampons cast over with Plaster of Paris.

ANALYSIS

The artefact has eggshell qualities and the tampons cast have rapidly absorbed the colour creating an oversaturation of colour in some places which could be considered gaudy. I like the changes in texture from smooth plaster to fluff from tampon strings and openings where the plaster hasn't quite covered the mould. The small holes offer an opening, although small, to potentially see into the cast.

PERIODS ARE BLUE



FIG. 25 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Periods Are Blue* (2017).

MATERIALS SCULPTURAL QUALITIES

- Plaster of Paris → Obvious
- Blue Food Colouring → Nautical
- Tampon → Smooth
- Soft

DESCRIPTION

The blue food colouring seeped through the cast creating a wave-like pattern. This was accidental as I expected the food colouring to react the same way as it did at the top of the mould. This happened because I poured the dye directly over the top of the Plaster of Paris mixture.

ANALYSIS

This artefact was created as a comment on the use of blue liquid in most menstrual products adverts. Now with Bodyform's #bloodnormal campaign (n.d.) using red dye representing blood is used in their adverts and the hashtag was used to encourage people to engage with the idea that period blood is indeed normal. Artist Jen Lewis has created a series of photographs of period blood suspended in water specifically *If I Bled Blue* (n.d.) as another protest to the blue representation of period blood in adverts.

TRANSFORMATION



FIG . 2 6 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Periods Are Blue* (2017).

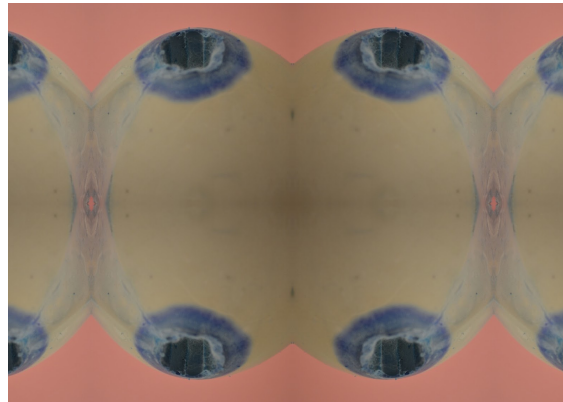


FIG . 2 7 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Periods Are Blue* (2017).

ANALYSIS

I removed the tampon because I felt it was too obvious. The repetitive nature of cleansing could be considered in the use of multiples and repeats of the same object. The removal of the tampon has created a fluffy negative space where it once was offering an alternative view into the 'vulvic space'.



FIG . 2 8 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Periods Are Blue* (2017).



FIG . 2 9 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Periods Are Blue* (2017).

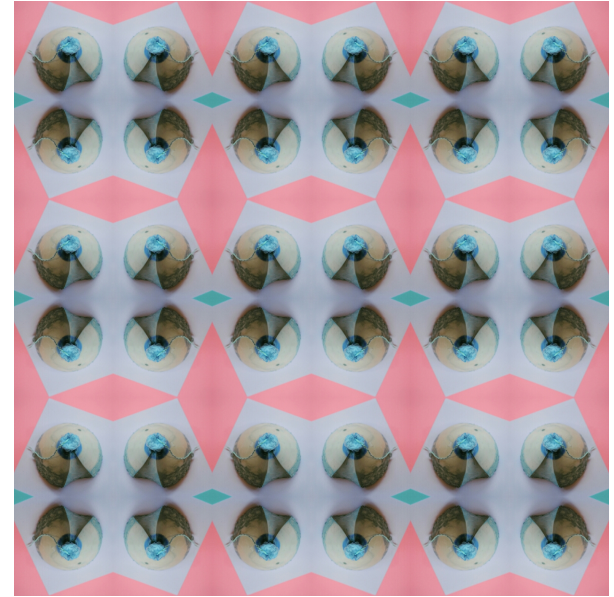


FIG . 3 0 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Periods Are Blue* (2017).

UNTITLED (2 TEETH)

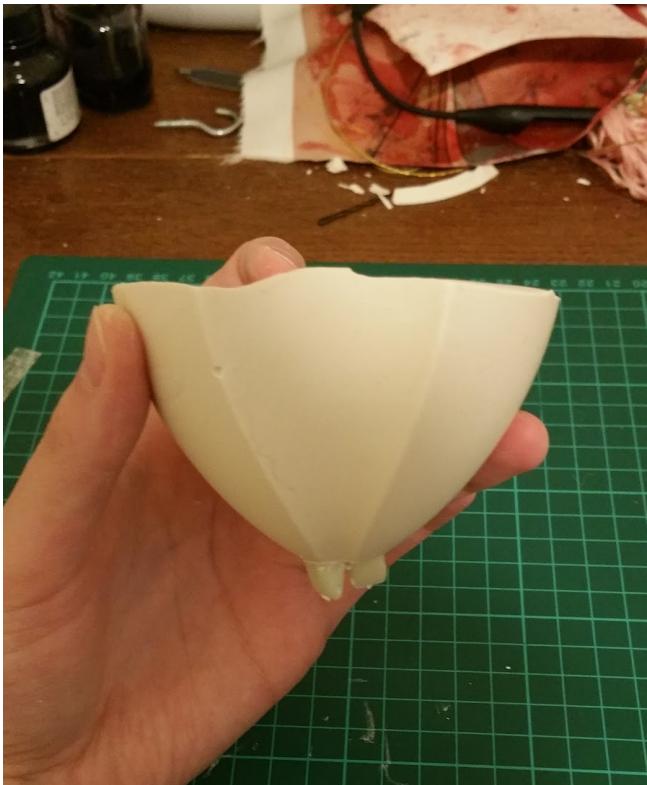


FIG . 31 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (2 Teeth)*, (2017).

MATERIALS

- Plaster of Paris
- Two Dental Veneers

SCULPTURAL QUALITIES

- Suggestive
- Clean
- Sterile

DESCRIPTION

This artefact was cast using the simple Plaster of Paris recipe with two dental veneers propped into the base of the funnel mould.

ANALYSIS

This has a few connotations initially. Firstly the teeth have similarities to labia minora and the groove from the funnel has an obvious mon pubis aesthetic. Secondly, the Plaster of Paris is smooth in texture and the milk-white colour feels very sterile and has clean qualities. All these properties feed into the myths about vagina cleanliness and cleansing rituals.

TRANSFORMATION



FIG . 3 2 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (2 Teeth)*, (2017).

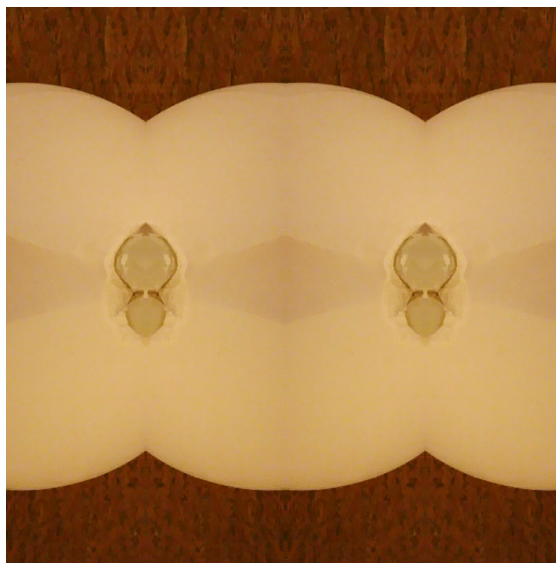


FIG . 3 3 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (2 Teeth)*, (2017).

UNTITLED (GEL)



MATERIALS

- Plaster of Paris
- Sass Gel Intimate Wash

SCULPTURAL QUALITIES

- Clean
- Smooth
- Viscous
- Cold
- Pure
- Sterile

DESCRIPTION

This artefact is simple in construction consisting of the basic Plaster of Paris mixture and Sass Intimate Gel Wash poured over the top.

ANALYSIS

It feels sterile and cold with the juxtaposition of plaster and the viscous gel. The artefact was created to explore the relationship between the two materials and as an embodiment of cleansing rituals.

FIG. 34 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Gel)*, (2017).

TRANSFORMATION



FIG . 3 5 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Gel)*, (2017).

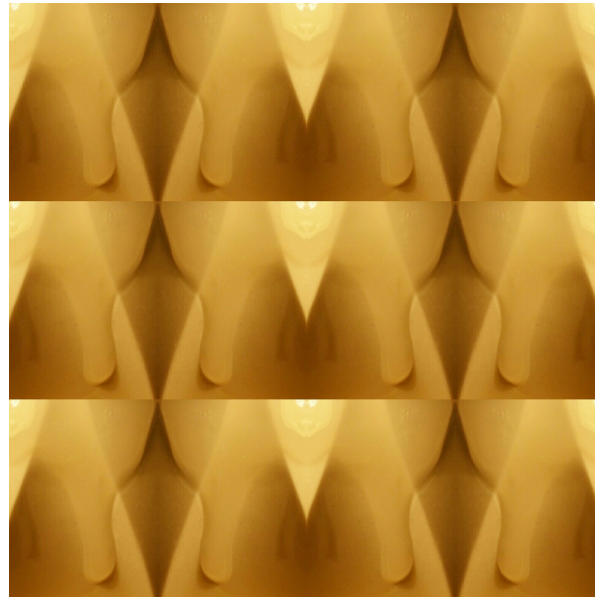


FIG . 3 6 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Gel)*, (2017).

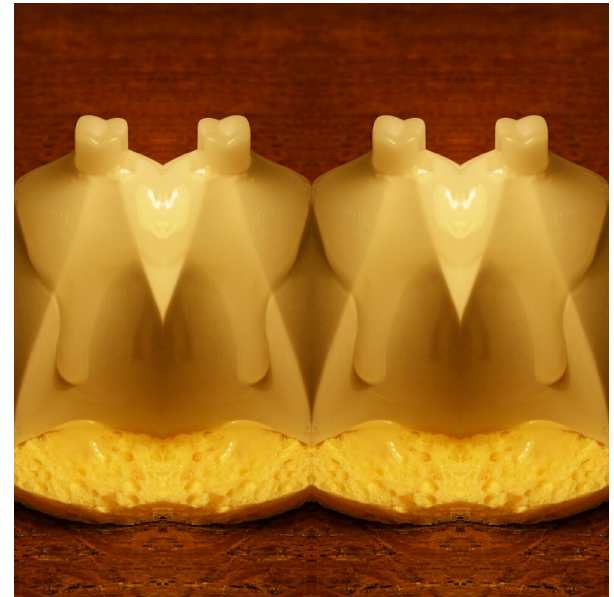


FIG . 3 7 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Gel)*, (2017).

PILL



MATERIALS SCULPTURAL QUALITIES

- Plaster of Paris
 - Contraceptive Pill (Cirelle)
 - Blue and Green Food Colouring
- Rough
 - Experimental
 - Foaming
 - Volcanic
 - Smooth
 - Effervescent

DESCRIPTION

Small funnel cast with Plaster of Paris and Cirelle Contraceptive pill.

ANALYSIS

This is one of my favourite small casts. Seeing how the pill has reacted with the Plaster of Paris. It poses the question of what happens when it's inside the body. The Pill could be considered a physical capture of an internal process. The object was recast over old moulds where there were leftover flakes of plaster which has created a fragmented texture along with the Effervescent properties of the pill. I am very pleased with the soft and hard lines where the traditional plaster has set around the pill.

FIG. 38 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Pill*, (2017).

UNTITLED (WAX PEARL)



FIG . 39 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Wax Pearl)*, (2017).

MATERIALS

- Plaster of Paris
- Wax Pearls
- Pink, blue and green food colouring

SCULPTURAL QUALITIES

- Gradient
- Layers
- Smooth

DESCRIPTION

Untitled (Wax Pearl) was formed by casting wax pearls used in salons for hair removal within the Plaster of Paris. The grey tinge to the bottom of the cast is because I recast over remnants of other casts to create further layers.

ANALYSIS

Once I had established the main casting recipe I started to experiment more with colour and adding different materials. The idea of layers and residue is key to the artefacts as a representation of the layers of history and myth previously discussed.

TRANSFORMATION



FIG . 4 0 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Wax Pearl)*, (2017).

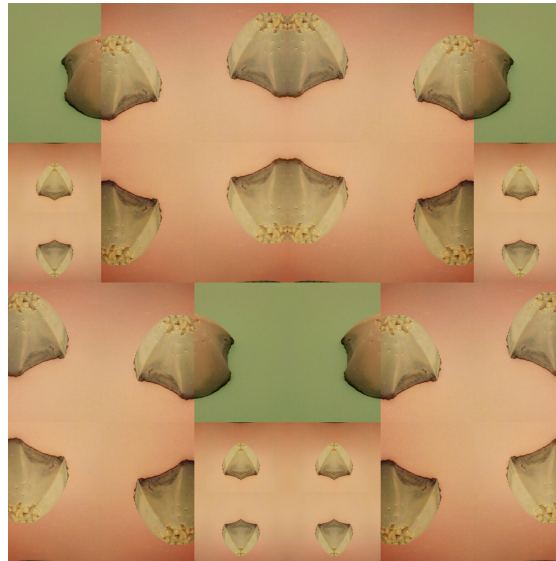


FIG . 4 1 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Wax Pearl)*, (2017).

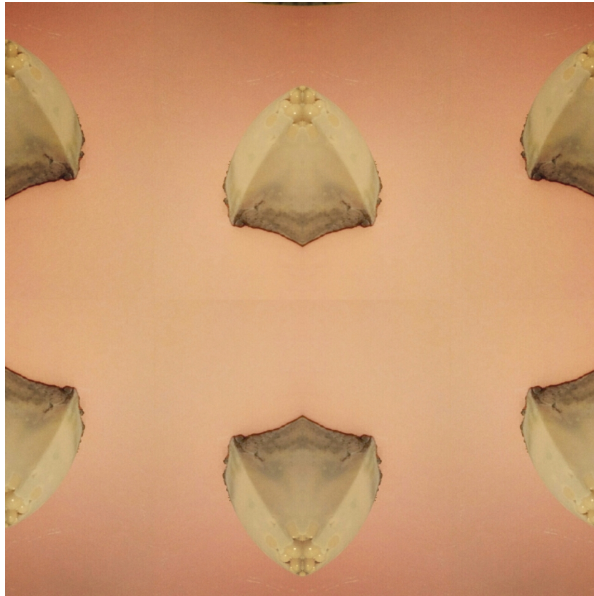


FIG . 4 2 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Wax Pearl)*, (2017).

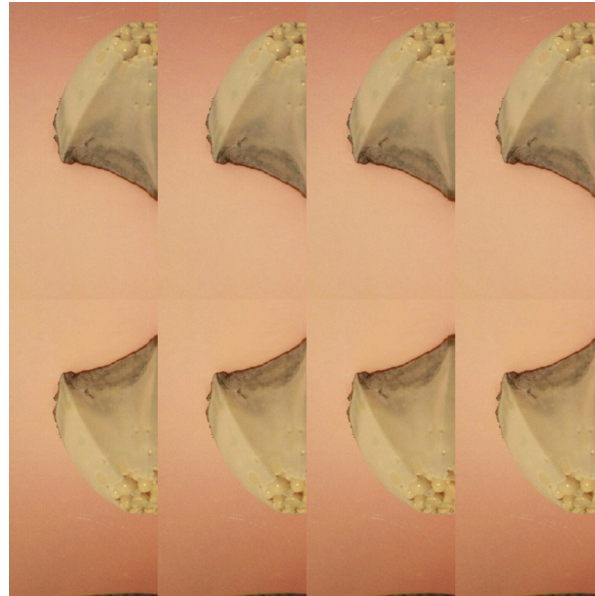


FIG . 4 3 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Wax Pearl)*, (2017).

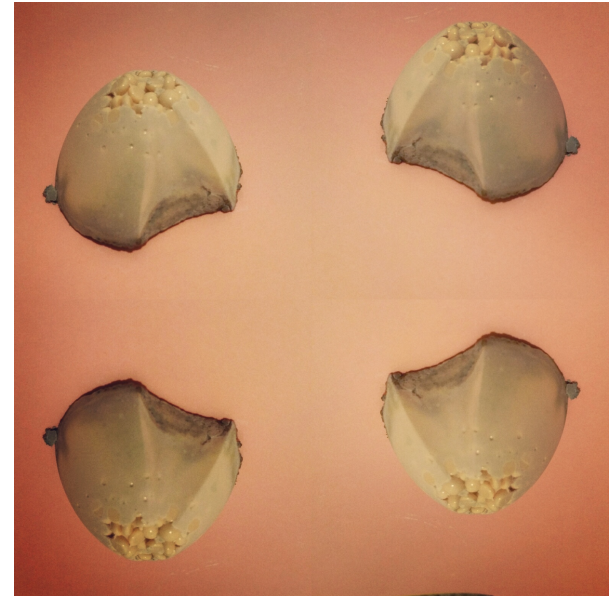


FIG . 4 4 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Wax Pearl)*, (2017).

UNTITLED (RED PEARLS)



FIG. 45 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Red Pearls)*, (2017).

MATERIALS

- Plaster of Paris
- Wax Pearls
- Red food gel colouring
- Red food colouring

SCULPTURAL QUALITIES

- Goopy
- Suggestive
- Viscous
- Wet

DESCRIPTION

Red food gel and wax pearls cast into a large funnel with Plaster of Paris poured over the top mixed with a small amount of red food colouring.

ANALYSIS

I wanted to explore the way the plaster cast around viscous materials and cast red food gel and wax pearls into a pale pink plaster. I had hoped the gel would blend through the cast however it is a gel which mixes differently to dye which created a separation effect between the gel and Plaster of Paris. The smooth outer layer could be interpreted as a representation of a cleansed vagina and the red gel and wax pearls could be comments on the messy side of having a vagina lush as period blood and hair removal. I like the contrast between soft and hard and smooth and sticky as it represents the preconceptions, expectations and potential reality of having a vagina.

UNTITLED (PINK TEETH)



FIG. 46 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Pink Teeth)*, (2017).

MATERIALS

- Plaster of Paris
- Dental Veneers
- Pink food colouring gel

SCULPTURAL QUALITIES

- Smooth
- Clean
- Soft

DESCRIPTION

Plaster of Paris tinted with red food colouring and cast over a selection of dental veneers.

ANALYSIS

The way the plaster has formed around the dental veneers and has left openings in the surface of the cast feels provocative and suggestive. From the outset, the object does not necessarily point towards the vagina dentata but feels like a softer approach. I was thinking about if the vagina did have teeth would they be soft or similar to molars rather than incisors. This cast is simple but effective and offers an alternative view when contrasted against conventional vagina dentata imagery.

TRANSFORMATION



FIG . 47 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Pink Teeth)*, (2017).

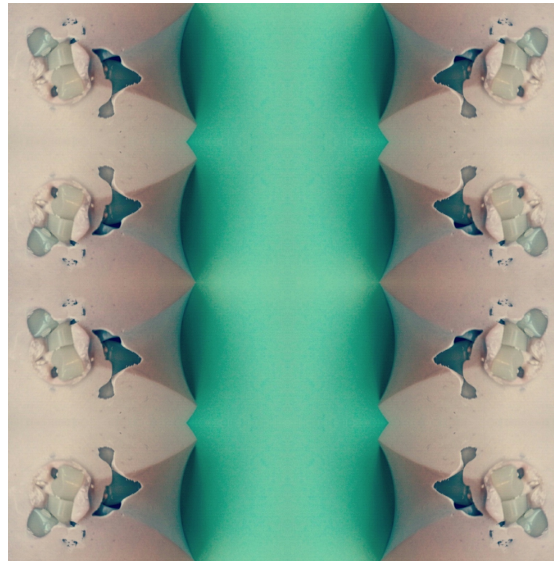
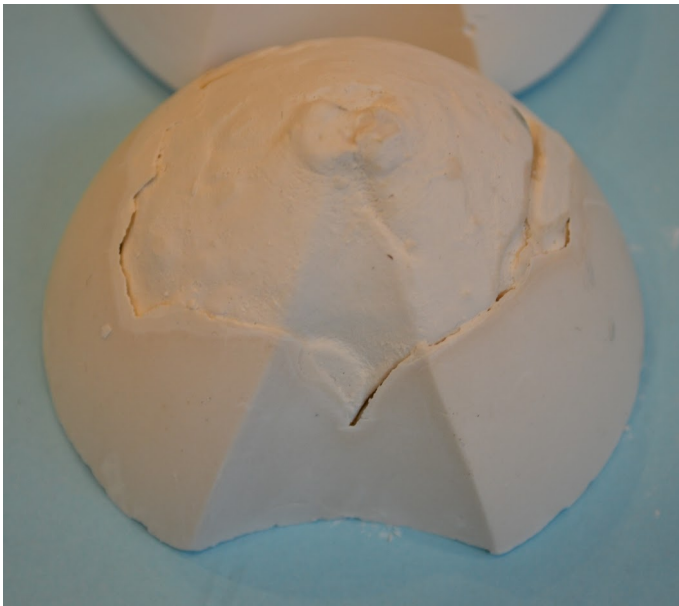


FIG . 48 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Pink Teeth)*, (2017).

ANALYSIS

I wanted to explore further the notion of soft teeth and subtly suggest the idea of vaginal walls and internal space. Similar to other manipulations the repeat and pattern making appeals to my practice as a tool to engage the audience, to subvert the gaze and navigate my work through Instagram. I like the colours in these images with pink and green. The green colour adds a freshness and offsets the pale pink surface of the artefact. The angles created from mirroring and rotating the image adds to the idea of internal space within the image (Fig. 50.).

UNTITLED (FEMFRESH)



MATERIALS SCULPTURAL QUALITIES

- Plaster of Paris
 - Femfresh
- Fragile
 - Moist
 - Smooth
 - Soft

DESCRIPTION

Plaster of Paris and Femfresh gel cast into a medium funnel.

ANALYSIS

I wanted to see how the Femfresh intimate wash interacted with the Plaster of Paris. I had hoped it would look different however it has created a negative cast of the gel. I was left with a crumbling surface layer

FIG . 4 9 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Femfresh)*, (2017).

UNTITLED (RED)



MATERIALS

- Plaster of Paris
- Red Food Colouring Gel

SCULPTURAL QUALITIES

- Damp
- Channels
- Delectable

DESCRIPTION

Plaster of Paris poured over red food colouring gel cast into a small funnel mould.

ANALYSIS

This artefact was an experiment where I cast food gel colouring with Plaster of Paris. It formed a mixed relief surface which I did not expect. This object has subtle connotations hinting towards blood however overall I feel it is an interesting experiment. During my time at Kin, a studio member said the artefact looked like a macaroon which inspired me to read the work as a potential edible object.

FIG. 5.0 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Red)*, (2017).

TRANSFORMATION



FIG . 5 1 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Red)*, (2017).

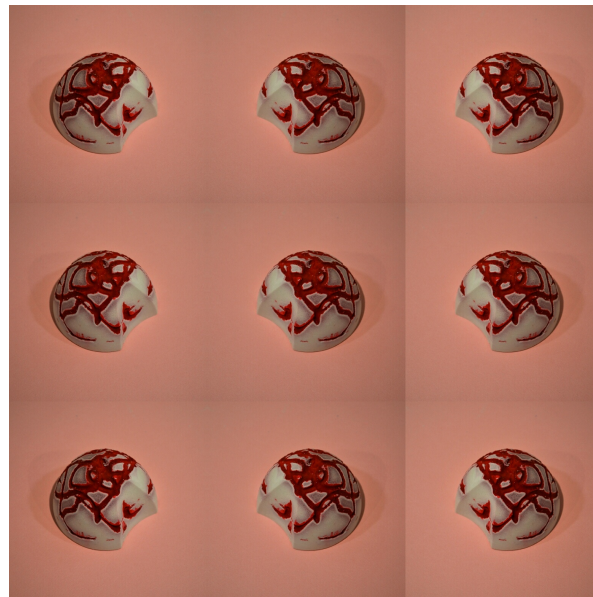


FIG . 5 2 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Red)*, (2017).

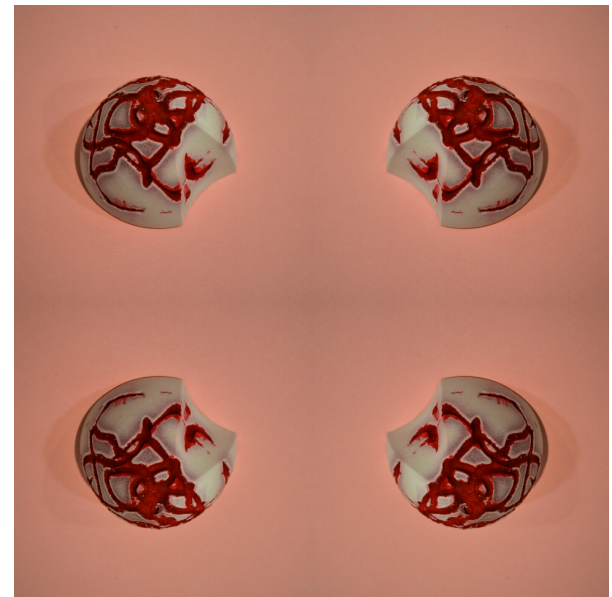


FIG . 5 3 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Red)*, (2017).

ANALYSIS

When photographing the object I wanted to emulate the current Instagram image aesthetic to encourage social engagement in my Instagram posts. The idea of the multiple and repetition of the object ties into potential repetition of myths about the vagina figuratively being repeated over and over again,

UNTITLED



FIG. 54 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled*, (2017)
Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

MATERIALS

- Tampon
- Red Food Colouring
- Blue Food Colouring
- Plaster of Paris

SCULPTURAL QUALITIES

- Subversive
- Textural
- Soft

DESCRIPTION

Tampon set within red food colouring and Plaster of Paris poured over the top into a small funnel mould.

ANALYSIS

The artefact feels like a cast of negative space where I have tried to translate an everyday process of dealing with a period. I do not know how a tampon ends up in a womb-space as this is another myth to contemplate. The belief that tampons can get 'lost' inside the body. Similar to the myth that the vagina moves around the body causing a string of ailments. Looking at this object conceptually I wonder how effectively this object conveys these ideas. The object itself is visually interesting with the textures from the cold plaster and the liquid-absorbing tampon. Utilising pattern and manipulating the image takes away some of the detail. It still creates an interesting surface however some of the details are lost in the instagram imagery. This could be considered positive as I am trying to be subversive using everyday and sometimes considered explicit materials to engage audiences to take a second look.

TRANSFORMATION



FIG . 5 5 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled* , (2017) Photograph by

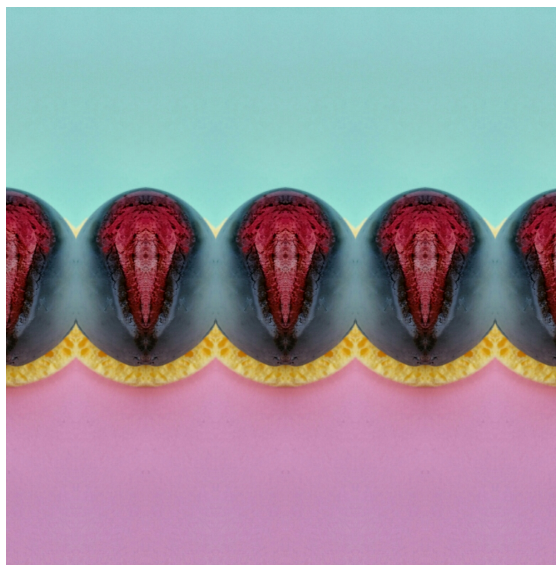


FIG . 5 6 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled* , (2017)
Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

Kashika Ashley Cooper.

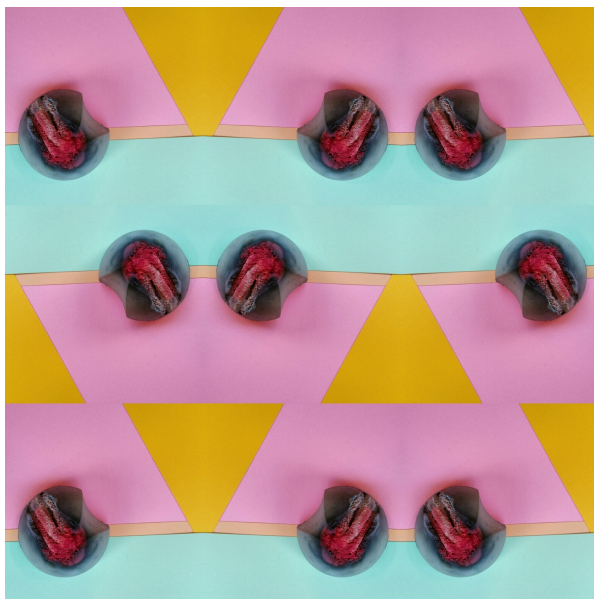


FIG . 5 7 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled* , (2017)
Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.



FIG . 5 9 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled* , (2017)
Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

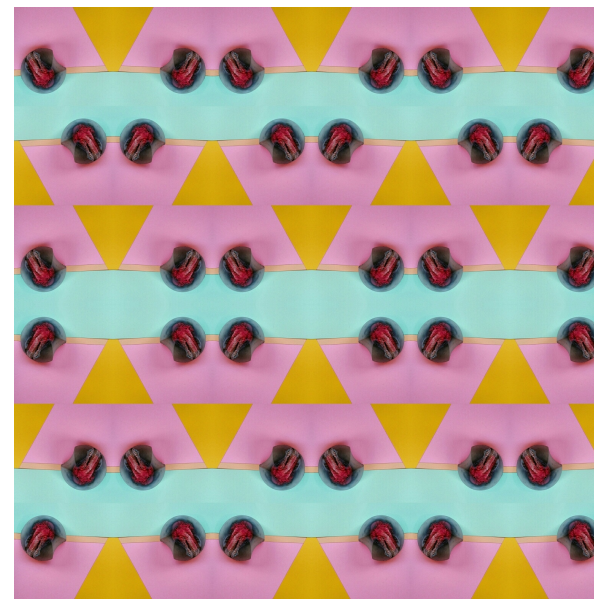


FIG . 5 9 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled* , (2017)
Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

UNTITLED (CROWN)



FIG. 60 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Crown)*, (2017)
Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

MATERIALS

- Plaster of Paris
- Sass Intimate Gel Wash
- Dental Veneer
- Makeup Sponge

SCULPTURAL QUALITIES

- Seductive
- Suggestive
- Provocative
- Smooth
- Sterile

DESCRIPTION

This was a simple plaster recipe with elements added post cast.

ANALYSIS

This cast brings together the notion of ritualistic cleanliness which has been crowned with a single dental veneer on top. This was a direct correlation between the myth of vagina dentata and the myth that the vagina needs cleansing to be clean. I like the interrelationship between the smooth, sterile plaster cast contrasted against the viscous gel and a crown of dental veneer on top as the final tooth of the vagina dentata. Compared to other artefacts where I have used multiple teeth, a singular tooth could be considered symbolic and subtly representative of a clitoris.

TRANSFORMATION



FIG . 6 1 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Crown)*, (2017)
Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.



FIG . 6 2 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Crown)*,
(2017) Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

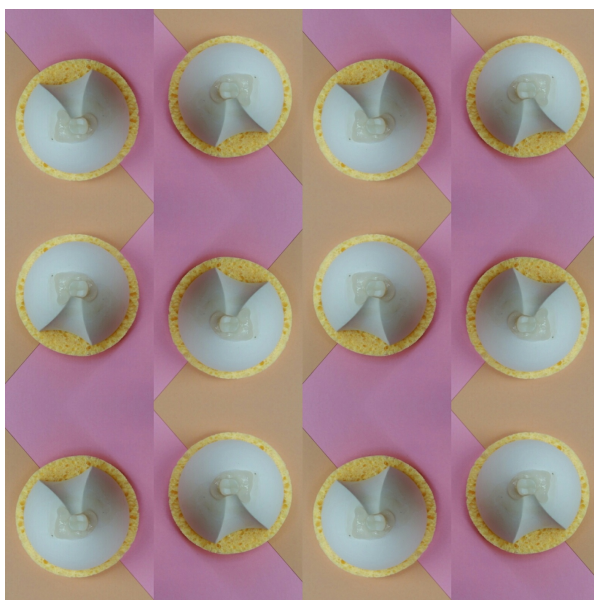


FIG . 6 3 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Crown)*, (2017) Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

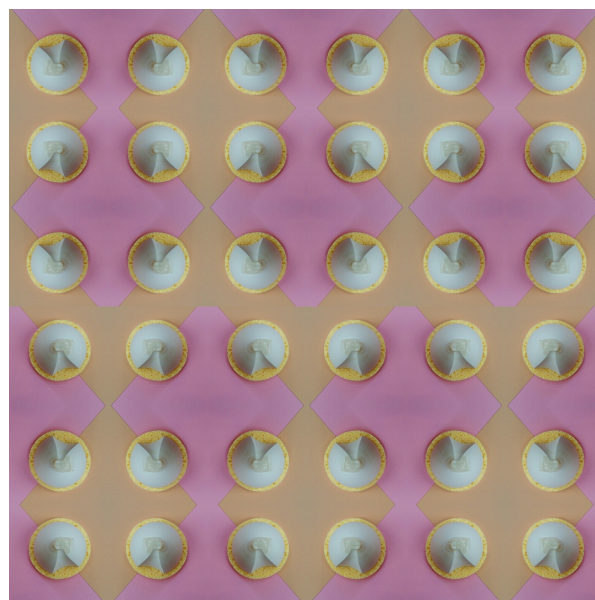


FIG . 6 4 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Crown)*, (2017) Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

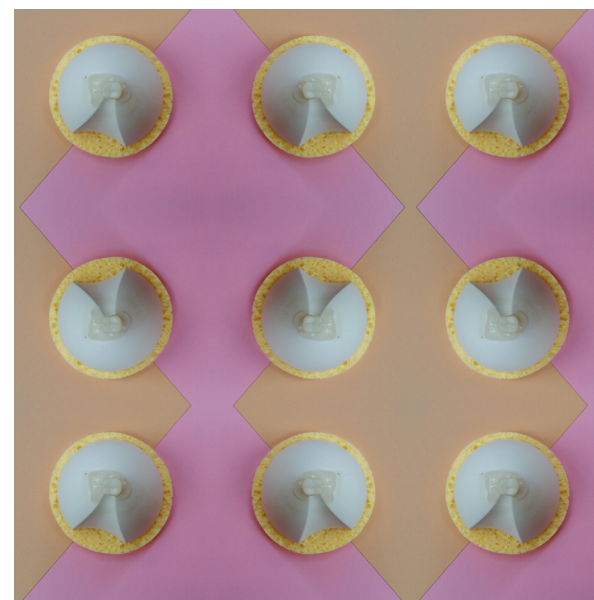


FIG . 6 5 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Crown)*, (2017) Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

UNTITLED

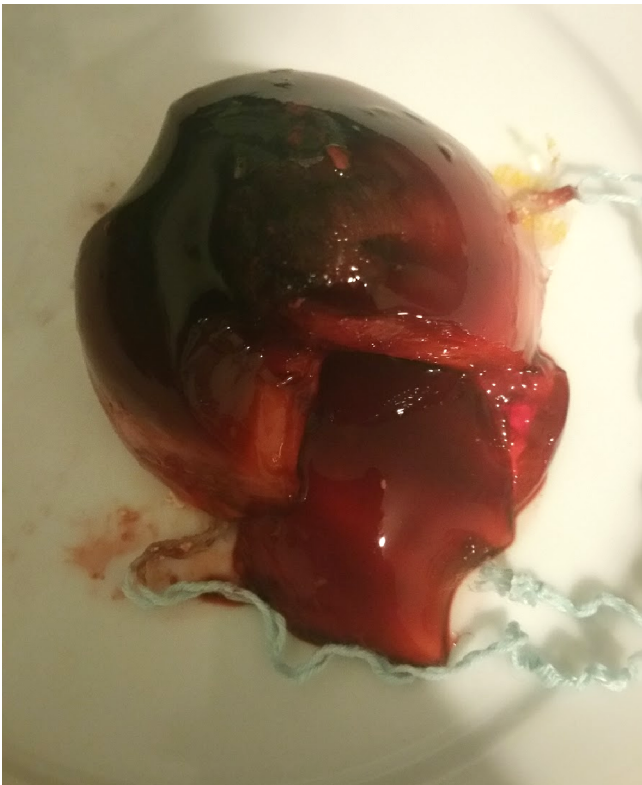


FIG. 66 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Jelly)*, (2017)
Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

MATERIALS

- Jelly
- Red Food Colouring
- Tampons

SCULPTURAL QUALITIES

- Viscous
- Glossy
- Suggestive
- Obvious

DESCRIPTION

Tampons cast with thin jelly in a small funnel mould with added red food colouring.

ANALYSIS

After working with Plaster of Paris, I moved towards jelly and gelatine as an alternative for a softer experiment. The outcome is obvious and this particular artefact feels obvious with the connection to period blood and the internal space of the vagina. As it can be seen in the gelatine snapshots it was a process which could be replicated quickly, where not much thought was critically given to the materials I chose to cast with. They were suggestive but did not directly correlate with the topic I am researching.

TRANSFORMATION



FIG . 6 7 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Jelly)*, (2017) Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.



FIG . 6 8 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Jelly)*, (2017) Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

ANALYSIS

When placed into Instagram the household details can be manipulated to become part of the pattern. Transforming the image in has added depth to the original, masking the image, creating new suggestiveness and symmetry.

Working with gelatine, post-reflection, was an unconventional method employed to try and understand the myth and rituals of cleanliness. However, I feel this became lost in the making process. Although the casts were a creative outlet they do not impact the initial research question as they are more of an extension of intuitive creative making. The transformation of these images change and mask certain elements but the materials used do not add value to the ideas I am trying to communicate.

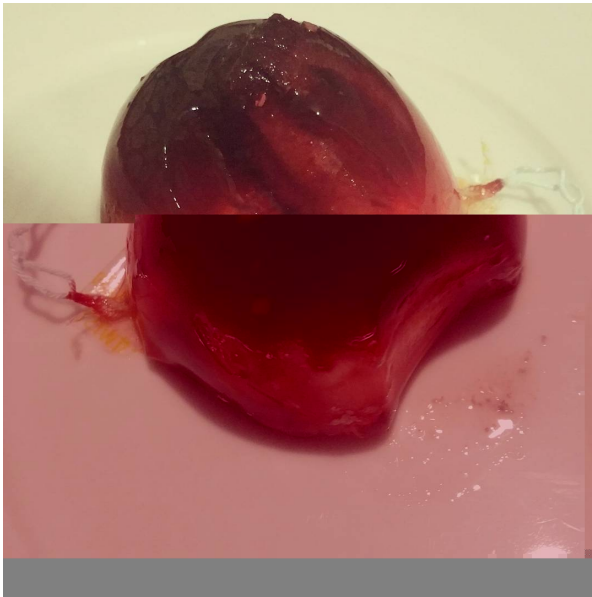


FIG . 6 9 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Jelly)*, (2017)
Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

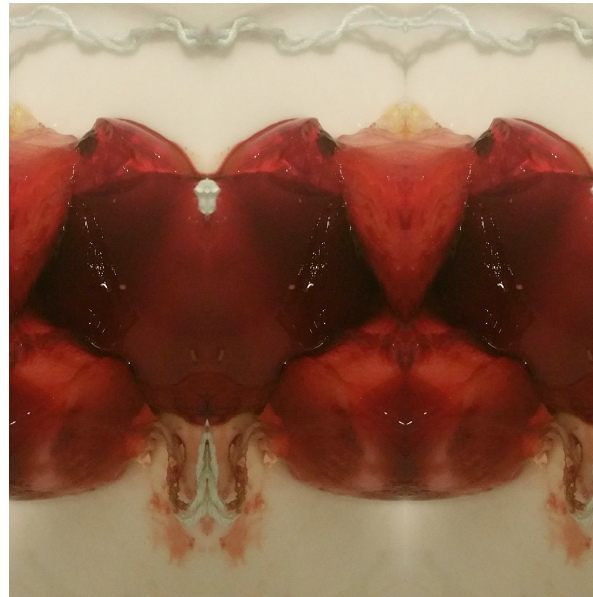


FIG . 7 0 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Jelly)*, (2017)
Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

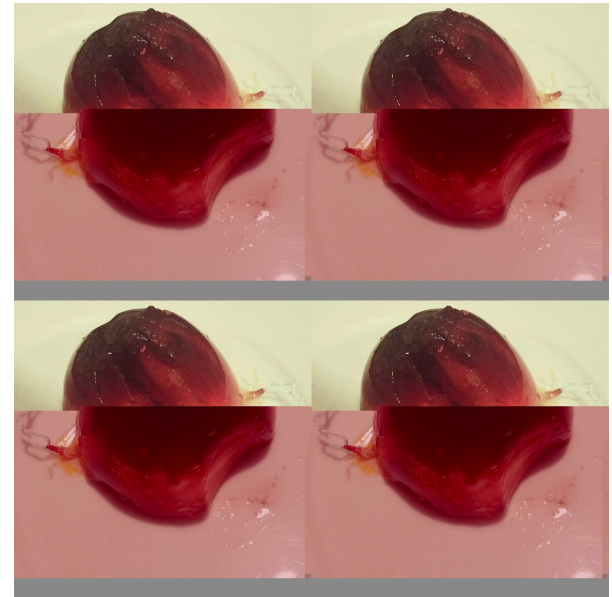


FIG . 7 1 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Jelly)*, (2017)
Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

GELATINE SNAPSHOTS

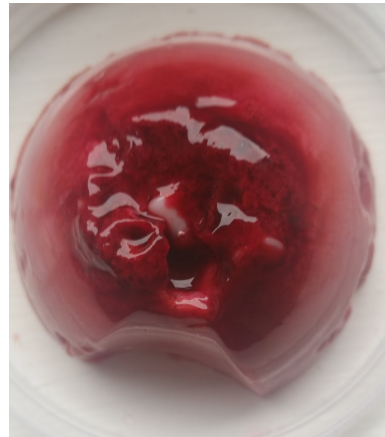
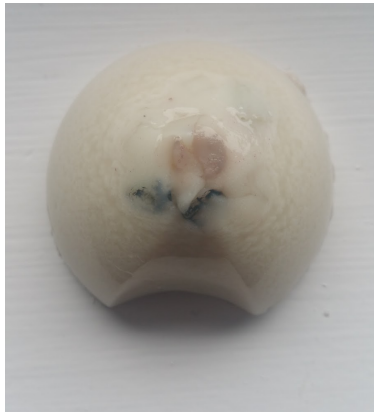


FIG . 72 Kashika Ashley Cooper, *Untitled (Jelly Snapshots)*, (2017) Photograph by Kashika Ashley Cooper.

3.7 SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT IN INSTAGRAM

In terms of social engagement, Instagram has advantages and disadvantages. On the outset, Instagram could be interpreted as a form of freedom with the ability to post images freely online and to have an instantaneous connection to a process. However, there are limitations in regards to censorship as discussed by Olszanowski. In terms of my own practice, I felt it was important to navigate and work around the censorship with the production of suggestive images which would potentially engage an audience to come to their own conclusions about what my practice is about. Using the notion of central core imagery put forward by Judy Chicago was a way to create suggestiveness within the image which is important in my practice as a tool to navigate the instagram sphere. The suggestiveness and seductive nature of the imagery was deliberate to appeal to a wider audience on Instagram. Often I was limited with descriptions and let the viewer interpret their own ideas about the work. This may be difficult to reflect on due to the nature of the platform as I am only able to see the impact of my work through likes and the odd comment left on posts. The intention of the Instagram posts were to subtly engage interest in a oversaturated visual context. This could be represented in likes but also it could be interpreted invisibly without my knowledge when people scroll through Instagram and come across the work but do not comment or like the post.

The social engagement on Instagram could be considered a misnomer because there was engagement through likes and comments however compared to a gallery setting the experience is different because of its virtual nature. It could be considered potentially there is no barometer to measure how the work has been engaged with and possibly little social engagement at all without having access to the metadata or being able to see the engagement behind the user interface of Instagram. I wonder if this is an integral part of my own practice to not be noticed and for the posts to sit alongside other imagery.

4.0 FINAL CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to explore if there was the residue of myth in items available to purchase for the vagina and how can these materials be transformed to question their relevance in contemporary culture.

- I have discussed the mythological history of the vagina through the vagina dentata and Ana-Suromai. I used Ana-Suromai as a tool to explore feminist art history and how artists are raising their own skirts to address their agenda.
- Casting in the studio produced some interesting outcomes with the experimentation of materials and helped further my understanding of the interrelationship of myth and everyday materials.
- Instagram allowed for the reconstruction of imagery to further transform the material properties of the objects I created. This allowed for reflection on Instagram as a tool for social engagement and to question whether social engagement is an important factor in my practice.

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